

## Parenting – Managing Stress in Children

Is it possible for a young child to experience stress?

Many parents often comment that children have nothing worry about. All they have to do is to go to school or the childcare and they do not have to think about the financial issues. On the contrary, a young child does experience stress. In this FAQ, the definition of stress is explained as the body's response to any intense emotional or mental demand placed on it by oneself or others.

The younger the child is, the more possible that a change may be stressful to them. For example, a family has to relocate to another country. As adults, we are caught up in the planning, in the finances and in house-hunting. We engage in activities to help us settle in the new environment. This helps us prepare psychologically to adapt to the new environment. However, the shift is stressful for the adults and most times we get flustered and worried.

On the other hand, the child does not have the chance to do anything about the change and most of the time it is not his choice. They would then have to make sense of the new environment. In addition, a young child has to unlearn or relearn what they were starting to understand of his world. Friends, culture language, the whole environment that they were used to before have been changed. That can cause immense stress for the young child.

Besides unfamiliar situations or environment, including changes within a family, social stressors like bullying and a child's personality can contribute to the child feeling stressed. Even having an illness can cause stress in the young mind.

Nevertheless, not all stresses are necessarily bad. Some stresses help to motivate the child and allow him to seek out alternatives to deal with his situation. If parents start to observe that the child is being "handicapped" by the stress, it may be time to find out what is causing the stress and help the child deal with the situation more effectively.

At The Therapy Room, the team of psychologists will be able to help too. Led by Geraldine Tan, the principal psychologist, the team of psychologists who is experienced with working with many children conduct therapeutic interventions. Should you have any concerns or inquiries, please feel free to click [here](#) and contact us to find out more.

What are some signs of stress in children?

Some behaviours to look out for is:

- Overeating or not eating
- Tantrums, moodiness and being rebellious
- Decrease in concentration
- Sleeplessness or sleeping too much

- Excessive fears
- Bedwetting

For some children they would complaint about psychomatic aches and pains, including:

- Headaches
- Muscle pain
- Stomachache
- Chest pains
- Even developing skin rash and ulcers

What can parents do when their child is stressed?

It is worrying to see changes in the child suddenly, especially when the changes are negative. Sometimes the child may find it difficult to articulate what he is worried about. As parents, we may feel helpless and even frustrated but it is essential to remember that if we feel frustrated, the child would feel worse as they do not know what you are angry or frustrated about. They would also not know how to manage the parents' frustrations and therefore, they will feel worse. Below are some tips that parents can try when they realize that their child is stressed.

1. **Verbalize your observations.** Let your child know you care and are sensitive to what they are going through. Tell them that you notice that they might be feeling a certain way about a situation. All you want to do is to convey that you are there to hear what your child has to share. Refrain from trying to justify their feelings or actions.
2. **Listen to your child.** Take time to hear what is going on with your child. Do not have him tell you the situation while you are watching a programme or on the computer. Be "fully present" when listening by giving your undivided attention. Refrain from trivializing the issue, correcting your child, or trying to solve the issue. Allow your child to share with you what he is going through. Show that you are interested and ask gentle probing questions such as "What happened next?" or "How did that make you feel?" Be patient with your child as he or she tries to express feelings or emotions that to them may not be easy to verbalize.
3. **Normalize the experience.** It is important for your child to feel that you understand his feelings and why he is responding in that particular way to the situation. Saying something like "That must have made you mad," or "I would have felt that was really unfair too," allows your child to feel connected to you

through the common understanding that you have with each other. This is particularly important when your child is facing stress.

4. **Help to identify emotions.** Children are not always able to verbalize their thoughts and feelings. When you notice your child feeling a certain way, expose them to the appropriate terms to help them identify his emotions by name. This helps your child develop his own sense of emotional self-awareness, the lack of which can itself be a great source of stress and frustration. It also enables him to communicate his emotions more effectively to others in other situations. Being able to accomplish these two tasks helps the child to have that emotional release which helps them to cope with his stress.
5. **Assist in alternative solutions.** Identify with your child the steps which they can take to feel better about the situation and to resolve the problem being faced. Have your child play an active part in this process of tackling the problem. This would help build confidence in his ability to cope with, think through similar situations, and come up with solutions in the future. Affirm the good ideas, and help refine them by getting your child to develop that idea/solution further. At times, this process of working through a situation, whereby the child is heard and understood, is itself a stress reliever. Move on to something positive once the steps have been decided upon. Be cautious to not dwell on the problem longer than is necessary.
6. **Just be there.** Your child may not always feel like talking about his problems. Do not try to force your child to share with you when he is not ready to do so. At times, your child may just need space to think through things and allow his emotions to settle down before sharing about what is bothering them. Let him know that you are there for them, and ready to listen when he feels like sharing. This means being physically present with him in the times or simply keeping him company. This would allow his to feel supported. Initiate doing something together which helps them to relax and unwind. Create the opportunities for him to feel comfortable and to share. When he is ready, he will open up.
7. **Be patient.** It is never easy to see one's child worried or upset over a problem. As difficult as it may be, resist the urge to fix every problem your child faces. You will not be there to wipe away every tear or solve every problem. It is not in your power to fix everything that goes wrong. Instead, it would be far more valuable to slowly help your child develop so that he is able to cope with life's problems and difficulties as they grows up. Help your child to become individuals who are able

to deal with the ups and downs, to verbalize his emotions, to keep cool and remain calm in the face of stress, and to be resilient and bounce back in the times when he fail. By being equipped with healthy coping strategies, your child will be better able to deal with stresses that come his way as he matures.

At The Therapy Room, a team of psychologists – led by Geraldine Tan, the principal psychologist – conduct parenting events and programmes. For more information, please [click](#) here for the upcoming parenting programs. Should you have any concerns or inquiries, please feel free to click [here](#) to contact us and find out more.